

GE13: Let's eradicate racism
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With the 13th general election round the corner, it is time for Malaysians to bring the big issues before prospective candidates and their parties, and get them to register their commitment to these demands.

These issues are what the politicians should be debating. Each candidate and political party should register their stand on each of these concrete demands.

Most of these concrete demands can be delivered very quickly and we will be monitoring closely to see if the candidates/parties carry them out.

The simple rules are:

- * If the candidate does not support our demands, don't vote for that candidate; and
- * If a party does not commit to carrying out our demands, don't vote for that party.

The first demand is for the eradication of 'institutional racism' that has been entrenched ever since the riots of May 13, 1969 led to a fait accompli situation for Umno/BN to introduce the New Economic Policy (NEP).

Institutional racism may be defined as '... that which, covertly or overtly, resides in the policies, procedures, operations and culture of public or private institutions - reinforcing individual prejudices and being reinforced by them in turn' (A Sivanandan, Director of the Institute of Race Relations, UK).

This seems like a concise working definition to look at the many examples of institutional racism in Malaysia that have been rampant since the NEP was put in place by the emergent state capitalists in Umno in 1971.

Institutional racism came about through the British colonial power reneging on their post-war promises of equal rights for all Malaysians after the reaction of the Malay aristocracy to the Malayan Union proposals in 1946.

Even economic policy nepotism so, the inclusion of Article 153 in the federal constitution on the 'special position of the Malays' has been interpreted by Umnoputras all these years in their own fashion, clean from the purpose of the original intent.

Since the promulgation of the NEP, they have been using 'bumiputera-ism' as a populist ideology to gain Malay voters' support, as well as a convenient way to accumulate their capital stake in the economy.

The 1971 amendments to Article 153, namely, (8A) on the 'quota system', were likewise implemented by Umno according to its whims and fancies, instead of proportionately on a faculty basis and sparingly as directed 'by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong'.

The blatant racial discrimination in development policies since 1971 have been seen in projects such as the Felda schemes, Petronas and others involving share allocations and the bestowing of privatised projects.

In education policy, the proud boast by the Higher Education Minister Shafie Salleh at the Umno general assembly in 2004, that he would not allow a single non-bumiputera to enter UiTM is perhaps the most blatant admission of racial discrimination in a public sector institution. But similar racial discrimination has existed for years since 1971 in other institutions paid for by taxpayers.

More instances of racism

Institutional racism has existed in the civil and armed services since May 13, 1969. Thus, while there were 30 percent Chinese in the civil service and 40 percent Chinese in the RMAF in 1960, the proportion in the civil service has fallen to below 5 percent and below 2 percent, if that, in the armed forces today.

azlanThe more pernicious form of institutional racism has been the racist indoctrination that has been seen or exposed in Umno general assemblies, the Biro Tata tertib Negara, school textbooks and other institutions.

In these institutions, racist ideas of *pendatang* (them) and *Ketuanan Melayu* (us) have been overtly and covertly propagated while the BN is portrayed as the defender of *Ketuanan Melayu*. The recent 'Interlok' controversy is merely a latter-day phenomenon that has been propagated in public institutions since 1971.

The Chinese and Indians have been portrayed in the official propaganda as *pendatang* (immigrants) as opposed to the *bumiputeras*, who are supposed to be 'princes of the soil'.

In recent years, Indians have borne the brunt of official racism as can be seen in the statistics on deaths in police custody and deaths through police shootings.

azlanIndians have also been marginalised through the neglect of the plantation sector and their displacement as urban settlers in recent decades.

The far-right in this country has been getting away with impunity. The historical blight of May 13, 1969 on the national conscience has to be cleansed through a truth and reconciliation commission.

There also has to be a public inquiry into the even more recent racist murders at Kampong Medan in 2001.

An Equality and Human Rights Commission should ensure that the racist outburst that we saw by Umno leaders in Kampung Baru in 1987, at the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall against Suqiu in 1999, and the racist rallies such as the Malay Action Front in 2001 are prohibited and adequately dealt with.

Thus, 'Eradicate institutional racism' should be the first of our 13th general election demands, in particular:

- * Abolish the NEP - corrective action in all economic and education policies must be based on need or sector or class and not on race with priority given to indigenous people, marginalised and poor communities.

- * Repeal amendment (8A) of Article 153 that was passed during the state of emergency in 1971 and was not in the original 1957 federal constitution.

- * Institutionalise means testing for any access to scholarships or other entitlements.

- * Implement merit-based recruitment into the civil service and armed forces.

- * Enact an Equality Act to promote equality and non-discrimination irrespective of race, creed, religion, gender or disability with provision for an Equality and Human Rights Commission.

- * Promote equality and human rights education in schools, unions and institutions.

- * Ratify the International Convention on the Eradication of Racial Discrimination, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

KUA KIA SOONG, a former MP, is director of human rights group Suaram.

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